

CALIFORNIA POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION



PRESENTATION

Marge Chisholm

California Postsecondary Education Commission
1303 J Street, Suite 500
Sacramento, California 95814-2938
(916) 445-7933
www.cpec.ca.gov

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Good afternoon, and thank you for inviting me to be here today. I am Marge Chisholm, Governmental Relations Coordinator for the Postsecondary Education Commission. The Commission is California's independent voice on higher education issues and we appreciate your giving us the opportunity to launch the discussion today on Access.

I would like first to talk about our enrollment projections for the rest of the decade, and what that enrollment will look like, some potential budget implications, questions that need to be asked...and answered... and finally, some recommendations for ways to ensure that as many students as possible have the opportunity to attain the education they need.

In your binders you will find two pages with enrollment information. These two pages reflect information contained in a report CPEC issued in February 2000. It is important to note that our projections were based on sufficient state funding, anticipated outreach efforts, academic preparation, moderate student fees, adequate financial aid, and broad course offerings. We expect the proposed 2003-04 budget reductions and fee proposals will impact these projections negatively. History tells us that the imposition of budget reductions and higher fees will likely reduce enrollment growth.

The first page illustrates fifty years of postsecondary education enrollment. You will note two periods of significant increases in enrollments. (Sometimes referred to as Tidal Waves I and II.) The first period, from 1960 through 1975, saw over 1.2

million additional students arriving at our college and university doors. (For the 20-year period from 1975 through 1995, enrollment increased much more slowly, with only 111,000 new students.) Then again in 1995 and projected out to the end of this decade, another 877,000 students were estimated to enroll in public higher educational institutions.

The second page depicts our enrollment projections over the last 12 years by segment. As you will note, each segment was expected to experience growth rates in excess of 30%...and that is exactly what has happened in the first few years of the projection. As you will notice, the community colleges will need to accommodate the majority of the enrollment growth, with about 530,000 students.

Now, what will tomorrow's enrollment look like? California students are, and will continue to be, the most diverse student body in the state's history with respect to academic and career interest, age, demographic makeup, and socioeconomic status. And almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the enrollment demand will result from population growth, with the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ a result of improved outreach and college preparation that lead to higher numbers of high school graduates ready for college.

This is the beginning of some challenging years, years where the State must make difficult decisions and find new ways of serving students. The most critical issue before State policymakers will be to determine WHAT Access really means and WHO, if anyone, will have full access to a higher education. The Commission believes that access to a higher education will be there, but many students' expectations might not be realized. For example, a student who is exceptionally well qualified might be denied admission to a program, a campus, or an institution that he or she has prepared diligently for but instead be given access to some other public college or university campus. Our research indicates that the percentage of California public school graduates completing university preparatory curricula has increased over the last decade from 31.3% to 34.8%. Although the universities have traditionally been able to accommodate all eligible students, next year's budget reductions coupled with increasingly better prepared students may signal a change in the universities' abilities to accommodate all qualified students...or offer the services and course offerings they expect.

The tough job facing State policymakers is that of prioritization. The Legislature and the systems of higher education will need to prioritize, to apportion, even to ration access if need be. All students may not be treated equally. Some students may be served at the expense of others. Possible scenarios could include fewer programs offerings, (thus limiting transfer opportunities as well as increasing the time to degree), reducing funding for low enrollment programs and majors, fewer classes

offered for working people who need weekend or evening classes, a smaller number of vocational program offerings, and fewer ESL and Basic Skills classes.

Here are some questions for you to consider: Should students at each of the three public systems have comparable opportunities? Should students pursuing a degree be a higher priority than others? Should graduate students be treated differently than undergraduate students? Should the workforce needs of the State dictate the programs that receive high priority? Can the State ensure a quality education, including all the services necessary, for new applicants as well as currently enrolled students?

While grappling with these kinds of questions, CPEC urges you to keep in mind three broad crosscutting principles:

- **Focus on students.** Providing full access for students will mean asking more of faculty, administrators, governing boards and others responsible for providing postsecondary education. Further, the students who should be protected and ensured access the most are those with limited enrollment options.
- **Focus on the economic and workforce needs of the State.** The Legislature should recognize those programs and fields that are most essential to the state's economic progress when determining priorities. Programs beneficial to the economy should be fully supported, particularly in shortage areas such as nursing and teaching.
- **Focus on crosscutting issues,** whereby the State addresses issues not by segment, but across institutions. Instructional costs, class sizes, financial aid, outreach programs, and workload issues are all areas that should be looked at not in "silo-fashion" but as cross-segmental themes.

In closing, there are no simple ways to ensure that all students have access to a quality higher education. The Commission urges you, as State policymakers, to exercise leadership in making the tough decisions at the state level, from a statewide perspective.